



PICTURE BY MICHEL ASSOUKA

**1926**

**100 YEARS OF CANADIAN**

**A TIMELINE**

WRITTEN BY MALCOM DAVID

**BLACK HISTORY**

**2026**

Every February, Black communities around North America celebrate Black History Month. The history and legacy of Black people is often an ignored chapter of Canadian history. While figures like Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks are revered for their advocacy within the American civil rights movement, seldom mentioned are the strides of Viola Desmond, Stanley Grizzle, or Carrie Best in the Canadian Black struggle.

In 1995, Canada nationally recognized February as Black History Month, 19 years after the U.S did in 1976. Despite this discrepancy, the origins of the month-long celebration of Black history and excellence stem from the same seeds planted by Dr. Carter G. Woodson.

**1926** - Dr. Carter G. Woodson, recognized as the “Father of Black History” launches Negro History week to recognize the achievements of the black population in North America. Dr. Woodson was born in in 1875 in New Canton, Virginia. He was the son of a slave and became the second black person to receive a PhD from Harvard. After years of educating himself about black scholarship and history, he believed that a celebration of black history would have a significant impact on future generations of black leaders (Chambers, 2026).

In his words ““If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated.” (Chambers, 2026)

He chose February because it was the month that both Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln were born. Douglass and Lincoln were two of the most influential figures in the emancipation movement. Lincoln was the U.S president who issued the Emancipation Proclamation that freed slaves in the Confederate states and Frederick Douglass was an abolitionist leader who escaped slavery to become a prominent voice for the freedom of African Americans.

**1937**- A Sunday school in Winnipeg holds a program to honor “Negro History and Education Week”. This is one of the first dedicated celebrations of Black history in Canada

**1946**- Viola Desmond, a Black businesswoman in Halifax, Nova Scotia, refuses to leave the “whites-only” section of a theatre. She is arrested and fined for her defiance.

Her act becomes a landmark in Canada's civil rights history.

**1958-** Willie O'Ree becomes the first Black Canadian player in the NHL with the Boston Bruins. This is a barrier-breaking moment for Black people in North American sports.

**1969** - Canada's first major student-led protest, known as The Sir George Williams Affair, is sparked by accusations of academic racism from Black and Caribbean students at Sir George Williams University (now known as Concordia) against Biology professor Perry Anderson.

**1979-** Toronto becomes Canada's first municipality to recognize Black History Month after pushes from the Ontario Black History Society's two founders: Dr. Daniel G. Hill and Wilson O. Brooks.

**1995** - The House of Commons officially recognizes February as Black History Month in Canada as a result of a motion introduced by Dr. Jean Augustine, the first Black woman elected to Parliament.

**2005-** Michaëlle Jean becomes the first Black person and Haitian Canadian to become the Governor General of Canada (2005-2010).

**2015-** The United Nations declares the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024). Canada recognizes the proclamation.

2018- Viola Desmond becomes the first Canadian woman to appear on a Canadian bank note.

**2020-** The Black Lives Matter Movement erupts in North America and globally after the death of George Floyd. The protests in Canada bring widespread public attention to systemic racism.

**2026-** The 100-year anniversary of "Negro Week", recognizing black excellence and achievements, is celebrated.

### References

Chambers, V. (2026). As Black History Month Turns 100, a Look Back at How It Began. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/us/history-of-black-history-month.html>